

Chapter VI

A New Church - A New Century

Energetic and a good organizer, Father Gallagher immediately set about to lay plans for the obvious need, a new and larger church. This one, he thought, must be adequate to meet the needs of the parish for future years, beyond the immediately foreseeable. Yet, as is always the case, available resources had to be considered. Nevertheless, he was encouraged by his superiors to pursue the enterprise.

The Board of Trustees had become the "Church Wardens." With their advice and counsel, the plans for the new church were laid. An architect was hired for this project, and a considerable amount of professional labor was hired. St. Philomena parish had seen its last do-it-yourself church.

Architect Kuntz designed the building for a fee of \$165, a quite reasonable sum, by today's standards. Even more striking is that all of the building materials, including the bricks, were delivered to the site for a total freight charge of \$37.18.

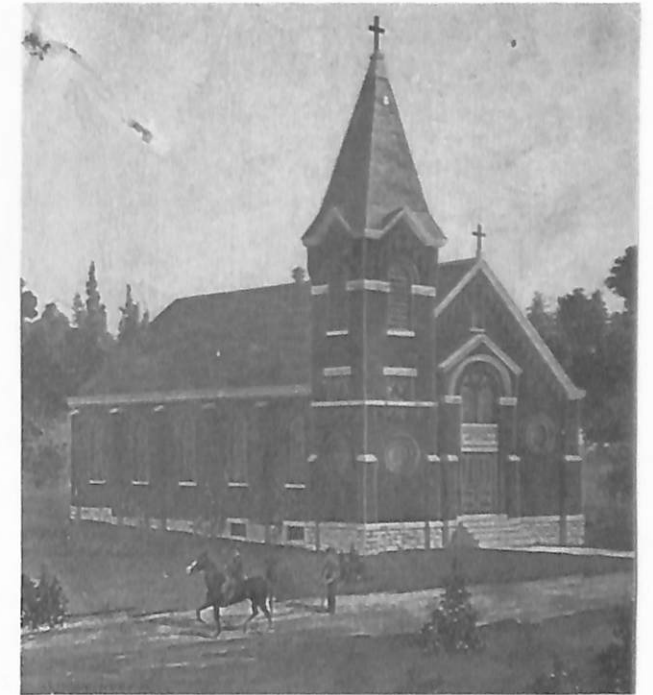
The Wardens included William Gernon, Conrad Wissel, Charles Gomien, the Secretary, William Craver, and Father Fred Gallagher. In addition to the professional labor hired, parishioners again donated a great deal of the labor. Nor was Father Gallagher's role purely administrative. A photograph showing construction in progress at the excavation stage clearly reveals a shirt sleeved Father Gallagher at work alongside parishioners.

Again, the overwhelming generosity that had been a parish tradition, was apparent. Subscriptions of parishioners raised more than half the cost of the new church almost immediately. The windows were more than paid for by donations. Fund-raising projects, including a picnic that netted an incredible \$922.14, took care of the rest. By the time the new church was consecrated, the entire cost of \$5,731.87 had been paid. The building began service free and clear.

The stone church was dismantled, with much of the stone used to build the foundation of the new building. The quality of the masonry work was outstanding. An inspection of the foundation today, 84 years later, reveals the soundness of the structure. The church, like the Church of which it is a part, was built to stand forever.

Remaining materials from the old stone church were sold to defray expenses. Stone brought \$15.00. The window glass fetched another \$10.30. Iron work was sold for \$3.00 and a door for \$1.00. The congregation was no less frugal for its generosity.

The project was completed swiftly. By November 26, 1905, the debt had been paid, and the church was consecrated by Archbishop Moeller. The speed with which the largest and most elaborate of the three church buildings to have served St. Philomena parish was completed, was due, in large measure, to the energy and drive of young Father Gallagher, as the following episode illustrates.



Architect's rendering of the church building, prior to construction.

George R. Craver had been baptized in the original church. He had been very active in the new church project and in the parish generally. His daughter, Nora Philomena Craver, related the incident of his being "rousted out of bed at midnight by the priest (Father Gallagher) because a trainload of building material had arrived at Gernon", a nearby crossing. Mr. Craver, Father Gallagher and other parishioners, likewise rudely recruited, had the material at the job site in time for work to begin by daylight the next morning.

Father Gallagher insisted that, in view of George Craver's efforts, his infant daughter should be the first Baptism in the new church. Thus, Nora Philomena Craver is the first entry in the baptismal records of the latest house of worship to bear the name of the Patron Saint.

The first marriage solemnized in the new church was that of Thomas Hebron and Louise Moniot, on January 11, 1906. A few days later, the first funeral Mass was said for Mary Yeager, who died on January 17.

The parish was "on a roll." It enjoyed sustained growth, a new church, a distinguished history, financial stability. Things could hardly have been better. Then, in 1906, bright, young Father Gallagher was reassigned, to larger, more visible St. Matthew Church in Norwood. That was, of course, understandable. Irish Catholic Norwood was experiencing an influx of Protestant Appalachian immigrants, and the Archbishop clearly wanted his "brightest and best" in position to maintain the Catholic nature of that community.

Much harder to understand, especially for the congregation at St. Philomena, was that Father Gallagher was not replaced. Instead, the "Mother Church" of Clermont County was reduced to the status of a mission church, served by Father Russell, commuting from St. Andrew's Church in Milford.

St. Andrew's had been founded in 1854 as, itself, a mission of St. Patrick's in Fayetteville, Brown County, which had predated St. Philomena by two years, in 1837. Fayetteville, founded by Irish immigrant McGroarty, was primarily Irish Catholic, and a very active congregation. Four present parishes, in fact, in three counties, trace their origins to the expansive zeal of St. Patrick's Hibernian sons and daughters.

But even while a "mission," the growth of the community at St. Philomena was unabated. Parishioners from the southern edge of the region claimed by St. Philomena began to increase